DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 464 988 UD 035 015

AUTHOR	Micklewright, John
TITLE	Social Exclusion and Children: A European View for a U.S. Debate. CASE Discussion Paper.
INSTITUTION	London School of Economics and Political Science (England). Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion.
SPONS AGENCY	Economic and Social Research Council, Lancaster (England).
REPORT NO	CASE-DP-51
PUB DATE	2002-02-00
NOTE	39p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, London School of Economics, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE, England, United Kingdom. Tel: 44 020 7955 6679; Fax: 44 020 7955 6951; e-mail: j.dickson@lse.ac.uk. For full text: http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/Case.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Child Welfare; *Children; Foreign Countries; Government Role; Inner City; *Social Bias; Welfare Recipients; Welfare Reform; Welfare Services
IDENTIFIERS	Equality (Social); European Union; United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

The concept of social exclusion has been widely debated in Europe, though there has been little discussion of its application to children. This paper examines what is meant by exclusion of children, considering the choice of reference group, the geographical dimensions of exclusion, and the issue of who is responsible for any exclusion of children. It looks at social exclusion in the United Kingdom and in the European Union, then it goes on to discuss the use of the concept of exclusion in the United States, where in contrast to Europe, it has achieved little penetration to date. To assess whether there are grounds for discussion of social exclusion as it relates to children in the United States, the paper focuses on various features of U.S. society and institutions, including the measurement of poverty, analysis of children's living standards, state versus federal responsibilities, welfare reform, the emphasis on personal responsibility, and politics and the economy. (Contains 58 references.) (SM)

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ED 464 988

Social Exclusion and Children: A European view for a US debate

John Micklewright

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CASEpaper 51
February 2002

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Editorial Note and Acknowledgements

John Micklewright is Head of Research at the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence and a Research Associate of CASE. He can be contacted at jmicklewright@unicef.org.

This paper was written for a conference on 'Social Exclusion and Children' organised by the Institute for Child and Family Policy, Columbia University, New York, 3-4 May 2001 (see http://www.childpolicy.org). In revising the paper the author has benefitted greatly from the comments of the discussants, Tim Smeeding and Jane Waldfogel, and of many other participants at the conference. Very helpful comments were also made by Tony Atkinson, Tania Burchardt, John Hills, Julian Le Grand and Brian Nolan. The opinions expressed in the paper are personal and should not be taken as representing those of the United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF.

Abstract

The concept of social exclusion has been widely debated in Europe but its application to *children* has seen relatively little discussion. What could be meant by exclusion of children is the first main theme of the paper. Among other things, I consider the choice of reference group, the geographical dimension of exclusion, and the issue of who is responsible for any exclusion of children. The second main theme is the use of the concept of exclusion in the USA, where in contrast to Europe it has achieved little penetration to date. To assess whether there is fertile ground for discussion of social exclusion as it relates to children in the US, I discuss various features of US society and institutions including the measurement of poverty, analysis of children's living standards, state versus federal responsibilities, welfare reform and the emphasis on 'personal responsibility'.

Keywords: children, poverty, social exclusion
JEL number: I31, I32, J13

1. Introduction

'How has the concept of social exclusion been applied to the situation of children in Europe?' I confess to departing in three ways from this brief from the conference organisers. First, I try to deal with the more fundamental issue of how the concept *should* be applied to children, as well as how it 'has been', including whether it is worth doing so at all. I hope this will interest European readers as well as those in the US for whom the first version of the paper was intended.

Second, my coverage of applications in Europe is limited. I refer mainly to the use of the concept by the institutions of the European Union and by the UK government. These examples are certainly not representative of all those in Europe, either at the official level or in academia (although I do refer to a few of the latter). Nor does the UK have a special claim to coverage as the birthplace of the concept (which was France). Nevertheless, if one comes to the European debate afresh, the EU and the UK are perhaps interesting because of the sheer prominence that the concept of exclusion now has in official pronouncements on living standards. The March 2000 meeting of the fifteen EU heads of government (the European Council) declared that 'the number of people living below the poverty line and in social exclusion in the Union is unacceptable'. Combating social exclusion is explicitly mentioned in the Amsterdam Treaty on Union. The UK under 'New Labour' now has an annual government report on poverty and social exclusion, a Social Exclusion Unit reporting directly to the prime minister, and various other initiatives that stress problems of exclusion and the need for an inclusive society.[1]

The EU may hold some special interest for a US audience because of its nature as a 'union' of member states, with the conflict that implies between governments at different levels and the questions it raises about the definition of the society from which an individual may be excluded. And the UK may be of particular interest for a conference on social

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[1] Initiatives of successive Irish governments under the Irish National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) would have provided another example of prominent use of the concept of exclusion in an English-speaking country. The first sentence of the NAPS refers to tackling both poverty and social exclusion, and the strategy is overseen by a cabinet committee on 'social inclusion', chaired by the prime minister (see www.welfare.ie/dept/reports/naps/index.htm).

exclusion and children because of the special position given to children by the Labour government in pronouncements and policies on both exclusion and poverty. Prime Minister Blair has vowed to end child poverty within 20 years and finance minister Brown has taken a prominent role in the fight, labelling child poverty 'a scar on the nation's soul'.

Third, I have not confined myself to Europe. Rather than risk writing in a vacuum I have tried to consider explicitly the possible application of the concept of social exclusion to the position of children in the USA. This is the subject of the last section of the paper, where I link back to themes discussed in earlier sections. Again, I hope that European readers may find this stimulates them to reflect on the definition and application of the concept in their own countries.

The last thing I should note at the outset is that although I talk a great deal about measurement, I concentrate on ideas rather than numbers. I have resisted the temptation to fill up the paper with tables comparing child well-being across Europe, whether from national analyses, those made by the European Union, or those by ourselves at UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre in our work on child well-being in industrialised countries.[2] In fact this is a paper with no tables at all!

I begin with some discussion of the concept of social exclusion as applied in the EU and the UK to the population as a whole. What has it added, if anything, to the analysis of living standards and of policies affecting them? This is the subject of Section 2. The child angle is the focus in Section 3. If we talk about exclusion of *children*, what particular aspects need to be considered and does the current debate and analysis in the EU and the UK give sufficient recognition to them? By this point the paper will have a rather fuzzy boundary between poverty and social exclusion, reflecting the application of the latter concept in practice, even if the two are (or can be argued to be) conceptually distinct.

Section 4 turns to the USA. Given the state of play in the US on various topics – measurement of poverty, analysis of children's living standards, state versus federal responsibilities, welfare reform, 'personal responsibility', politics and the economy – is there fertile ground for the

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2 These include UNICEF (2000, 2001, 2001a, 2002) which compare different dimensions of childhood disadvantage across all OECD countries, Micklewright and Stewart (1999, 2000, 2001) who focus on the EU, and Bradbury, Jenkins and Micklewright (2000, 2001) who look at a selection of industrialised countries, including the US. (For more details see the UNICEF IRC website www.unicef-icdc.org.)

discussion of social exclusion and children? Or, at least, does it seem so when viewed from Europe?

2. Notions of social exclusion in Europe

Chiara Saraceno's paper at this conference gives an excellent account of the development of the concept of social exclusion in European thought and of various lacunae that remain (Saraceno 2001). But how has the concept been applied? My restriction to the EU and to the UK must again be emphasised. I give no account, for example, of the French government's initiatives under an exclusion heading, such as the Revenu Minimum d'Insertion. (France is the intellectual birth place of exclusion, as Saraceno describes – see for example the work in the 1970s by René Lenoir on *Les Exclus*.)

Social exclusion in the UK

The UK government defines social exclusion as:

> 'a short-hand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environment, bad health and family breakdown' (Social Exclusion Unit 2001: 10).[3]

The words 'can happen' are important. Social exclusion *can*, but does not necessarily happen, when there is a combination of the circumstances listed. Merely (merely!) suffering from the circumstances listed does not equate with being socially excluded: they are not sufficient conditions for exclusion. And the circumstances mentioned are given only as examples, even if they are intended to cover many of the possibilities: hence neither are they necessary conditions. Nor, in fact, is the fate that 'can happen' actually described. So what we are left with is a description of examples of circumstances that may lead to exclusion rather than a definition of exclusion itself – although its fairly obvious that the implied fate behind the wording is one of being 'shut out' from society in some sense.

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[3] This definition is also given on Social Exclusion Unit's website (www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu/index.htm) and in the government's new annual report on poverty and social exclusion (Department of Social Security 1999, 2000).

This picking over of the UK government's description is not intended to ridicule the authors' chosen words. Rather it is meant to illustrate that exclusion is a concept that defies clear definition and measurement – and which as a result is hard to use as a policy target in the conventional sense. Although the UK government's annual report on poverty and social exclusion contains a vast range of statistics on various dimensions of living standards, some of which are described in Section 3, it does not try to count the number of excluded people, nor to indicate which of the chosen indicators relate to exclusion and which to poverty.

Social exclusion in the EU

This lack of clear definition is found again in the EU's analyses of social exclusion. The concept has in fact a long history in EU parlance. As Tony Atkinson has noted:

> 'Cynics have suggested that the term "social exclusion" has been adopted by Brussels to appease previous Conservative governments of the United Kingdom, who believed neither that there was poverty in Britain nor that poverty was a proper concern of the European Commission' (Atkinson 1998: 1)

Whatever the genesis, the term appears to be here to stay in the EU, as the introduction to this paper illustrates. The 1998 Eurostat Task Force on Social Exclusion and Poverty statistics (Eurostat is the EU statistical office) considered social exclusion as:

> '...a dynamic process, best described as descending levels: some disadvantages lead to some exclusion, which in turn leads to more disadvantages and more social exclusion and ends up with persistent multiple (deprivation) disadvantages. Individuals, households and spatial units can be excluded from access to resources like employment, health, education, social or political life.' (Eurostat 1998: 25).

However, the Task Force declined to define social exclusion precisely, arguing that this was just not possible. Rather, it concluded that the statistical analysis of exclusion should (a) start with those on lower income, on the grounds that this is where exclusion has the most severe consequences. It should then (b) focus on the labour market given 'the importance of employment as the core of the social tie, as the entrance to social protection, as it gives a social identity, social status, satisfaction,

social contacts and prevents families from long term poverty'. Finally, the analysis should (c) consider the overlap between low income and a weak labour market position with various non-monetary indicators of well-being, relating to dimensions such as skills and knowledge and access to health care, education, public transport and state benefit systems – with both objective measures and subjective measures taken into account.

The Eurostat Task Force did not make recommendations and then look around for data to implement them. The idea was – and is – that for practical purposes the European Community Household Panel (ECHP) would be used to investigate poverty and social exclusion on a comparable basis across EU member states. This important resource is an annual household panel survey operating in 14 of the 15 EU countries. ECHP started in 1993 and collects detailed information on non-monetary indicators of deprivation as well as information on incomes, the labour market and standard demographic and household variables.

Eurostat has now started to publish detailed analyses based on its conception of social exclusion, notably with a report in late 2000, *European Social Statistics: Income, Poverty and Social Exclusion* (Eurostat, 2000). The chapter titled 'social exclusion' contains, for example, a series of tables showing the percentages of persons in each country that cannot afford to eat meat or fish every second day, who cannot afford a week's holiday away from home each year, who cannot afford various durable goods, who report bad health, who meet friends or relatives less often than once a month, and so on. These tables distinguish between the poor, the non-poor, and the 'persistently' poor – those who have been poor for three consecutive years. Other tables explore the links with lack of work.

Note the implication in this form of presentation (and in the Task Force's conclusions that preceded it) that it is a combination of conditions that represent exclusion, as in the UK government's definition given earlier. Many commentators would disagree with this however, arguing that one can be excluded as the result of a single condition alone.

Value-added to the policy debate

What do these attempts to measure things that are relevant to exclusion add to the policy debate? As far as the European Union is concerned, there is no doubt that the analyses by Eurostat of ECHP have started to

shed much light on how disadvantage varies across member states. We are now beginning to know a great deal more about how living standards vary across the Union, how deprivation in terms of low income and lack of work is linked to that in other dimensions, and how the strength of this link varies from country to country. But it is unclear whether that needed 'exclusion' as an organising concept (of which more anon) and whether policy is being much influenced as a result.

On the policy side, as far as expenditures of the Union institutions are concerned, 'social exclusion' takes a back-seat to 'economic and social cohesion', the concept that drives development policy within the EU's borders.[4] (Leaving aside agricultural support, development policy dominates the very limited EU budget.) The Treaty on Union states firmly the goal of 'raising of the standard of living and quality of life' within member states and a reduction of disparities in well-being among members is at the heart of the European project, i.e. greater 'cohesion', a goal also stated explicitly in the Treaty. But greater cohesion has not to date been interpreted as 'less exclusion'. Rather it has been taken to mean a reduction in differences in GDP per capita, with EU development policy trying to achieve this via (broadly speaking) investment in infrastructure targeted on low income regions.

This situation reflects the principle of 'subsidiarity' within the EU – the requirement that decisions be taken at the closest level to the citizen at which they can be effective. Subsidiarity means that most policy to combat poverty and social exclusion will remain a national rather than an EU responsibility – at least that policy that aims explicitly to redistribute rather than to narrow disparities via catch-up growth.[5] However, this does not mean that the EU institutions' adoption of exclusion is of no consequence for policy. Union institutions can act as a catalyst for policy change, helping stiffen the resolve to act in individual member states, cajoling and sometimes even obliging action at the national level. This process is known in EU parlance as 'open co-ordination'. The December 2000 European Council meeting of heads of government followed up on the March meeting referred to in the introduction with the agreement that each member state would

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[4] See European Commission (2001), the second periodic report on cohesion that is required of the Commission by the Treaty on Union. 'Social exclusion' gets little mention.

[5] See Atkinson (1998: 142-3) for a positive view on the redistributive function of EU institutions given the principle of subsidiarity and for discussion of how this relates to the Social Chapter of the Treaty on Union.

implement by June 2001 a two-year National Action Plan (NAP) for combating poverty and social exclusion – on the basis of jointly adopted objectives. NAPS are submitted to Brussels and lead to a joint report by the European Commission and member states. Eurostat's analyses of exclusion will hopefully be one of the elements that inform national choices of targets. Another will certainly be the report on indicators commissioned by the Belgian government during its Presidency of the EU in 2001 (Atkinson et al. 2002).

The UK government, using the language of exclusion across the policy spectrum, emphasises the need for what it calls 'joined-up' policy – policy that results from collaboration between government departments, and which recognises the links between the problems of unemployment, poor skills, low incomes and so on listed above in the quotation from the Social Exclusion Unit. This emphasis on 'joined-up' policy is said to contrast with earlier governments' initiatives which are argued to have dealt with each problem individually.

New Labour's determination to tackle deprivation in its many forms in the UK is clear. The second annual report on poverty and exclusion starts a section titled 'Our Strategy' by noting firmly:

> 'We are committed to eradicating child poverty in 20 years and halving it in 10, to providing employment opportunities for all those who can work, and to breaking the cycle of disadvantage which can perpetuate the effects of poverty throughout people's lives, from generation to generation' (Department of Social Security 2000: 4).

Few people would have problems signing up to goals such as these (and the child emphasis within them is returned to below). But is the concept of *exclusion* essential to their selection, to the formulation of policy flowing from them, and to ensuring popular support so that policies can be both implemented and survive in the future?

Not everyone would immediately reply in the affirmative. Ending their major study of household living standards, *Resources, Deprivation and Poverty*, Brian Nolan and Chris Whelan make a strong case for continued emphasis on the concept of poverty in preference to social exclusion (Nolan and Whelan 1996: section 8.5). As they rightly point out, those who argue that exclusion is a more comprehensive concept than poverty, relating to multi-dimensional disadvantage, may confuse the way that poverty is most often measured – via income – with the way with which it is conceptualised. Poverty can be defined in the broadest possible terms. For example, the definition adopted by the EU

of the poor as long ago as 1984 is of those with 'resources (material, cultural and social) [that] are so limited as to exclude them from the minimum acceptable way of life in the Member States in which they live' (Eurostat, 2000: 11). (I discuss the focus on a *national* norm in the next section.)

In practice Nolan and Whelan argue for the term poverty to be restricted to a lack of items (including participation in an activity) viewed by society as necessities where that lack is caused by insufficient income and other financial resources.[6] They are careful to emphasise that poverty defined in this way should not be the limit of concern about living standards, noting the need to assess aspects determined via non-market processes such as publicly provided health care and housing. However, they question whether social exclusion has yet been defined and operationalised in a way that helps very much in that additional assessment.

Neither in the UK government's annual report on poverty and exclusion nor in Eurostat's analyses, is it easy to point to anything concrete that one can be quite sure would not have been there without the existence of the concept of social exclusion. For the defence, the argument can be made that exclusion has sensitised researchers and policy makers to a much broader agenda. Proponents would say it has shifted the debate on living standards away from description and onto *processes* affecting changes in living standards, especially those that are not related to the level of resources an individual commands. (Nolan and Whelan admit the first possibility – the broadening of the agenda – but deny the logic in the second.) Some would argue that a focus on exclusion has also usefully emphasised the area-based nature of certain problems, and hence has stimulated area-based policies (for example in deprived inner city areas).[7] Others would emphasise the dimension of individual perception implied by exclusion – excluded people feel excluded – contrasting this with traditional measures of deprivation based on objective measurement (although the Dutch school of subjective measurement of poverty should be recognised).

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[6] Nolan and Whelan's empirical work was based on Irish household survey data and their conception of poverty has in effect been reflected in the central target of the Irish government's National Anti-Poverty Strategy, which is a reduction in the numbers of 'consistently' poor – low income *and* lacking necessities (see Nolan 1999, 2001).

[7] Area-based policies are an important plank in the UK government's strategy to tackle exclusion. Glennerster et al. (1999) review the debate on this subject.

The value-added by the concept of social exclusion will continue to be debated. On the concept itself, Tony Atkinson (1998) has tried to identify three common elements in the discussion, whatever definition of exclusion one might settle on: relativity, agency and dynamics.

- *Relativity*. This may seem obvious but needs emphasis. Individuals are excluded from a particular society. Exclusion can only be judged by looking at a person's circumstances relative to those of others in a given place (and at a given time).
- *Agency*. People are excluded by an act of some agent. The emphasis on agency may help in the identification of the source of the problem and hence with efforts to tackle it.[8]
- *Dynamics*. Exclusion may come about because of dim future prospects and not just because of current circumstances.

These three elements provide useful reference points for a discussion of the child dimension to exclusion, to which I now turn.

3. The child dimension to exclusion

Discussion of exclusion among children needs to refer to their future prospects as well as their current living standards ('dynamics'). A decision has to be made on the comparison group – other children or all persons – and on the geographical area for comparison ('relativity'). And the issue of who excludes children needs to be considered ('agency').

Children's future prospects

The idea that social exclusion may result from dim future prospects makes one think pretty quickly about children. 'Exclusion' may offer a useful label for the fate that awaits some children who suffer from various disadvantages in childhood which threaten their capability to achieve in the future (in the Sen sense). This includes disadvantage in

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[8] An analogy may be made here with recent attempts to integrate the concepts of human development and human rights (UNDP 2000). The non-fulfillment of economic, social and cultural rights implies that someone has violated the rights of another, either actively or through having failed to take some action. This, it is argued, provides some edge to debate on why human development may falter.

traditional dimensions of 'child development': education and health. It also includes teenage motherhood (although arguably this illustrates the 'can happen' in the UK government's definition of exclusion – I think it would be wrong to label all teenage mothers as definitely excluded). It could also include institutionalisation. Children living in institutions suffer many disadvantages including the obvious one of being excluded, literally, from normal family life and parental attention and affection. Low income – especially persistent low income – is also on the list, although the 'What Money Can't Buy' issues highlighted by Susan Mayer (1997) in the US need to be remembered, something that underlines the importance of other direct measures of disadvantage.[9]

This conception of exclusion as it relates to children is central to the British government's presentation of social exclusion in the UK. Children are very high on New Labour's agenda in its efforts to tackle poverty and exclusion. Children are frequently the chosen entry-point into the whole debate: examples of childhood disadvantage, whether labelled as exclusion or poverty, are often mentioned first in the opening paragraphs of government reports. (Sometimes the same statistics appear to be treated as measures of poverty in one report and of exclusion in another.) The emphasis is often on those disadvantages that threaten future life prospects. For example, seven of the 13 indicators in the second annual report on poverty and social exclusion that are intended to be used for monitoring progress among children and young people involve measures of education or learning.[10] Teen pregnancy is there too. (Britain has the highest rate of teen births in Europe and one of the highest in the OECD – see UNICEF 2001a.)

The contrast with Eurostat statistics on poverty and social exclusion is marked. While the UK government has separate indicators for (i) children and young people, (ii) working age adults and (iii) the elderly, Eurostat's recent report based on ECHP (Eurostat 2000) focuses on measures of household living standards which are then merely

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[9] Attempts in Europe to separate out the independent effect of low income in childhood on life chances include Gregg and Machin (2001) and Hobcraft (1998) for the UK, and Büchel et al. (2001) for Germany. Some may label long-term or recurrent poverty itself as exclusion. However, as Atkinson (1998) argues, while persistent poverty may greatly increase the risk of exclusion, time spent poor in the past should not be equated with ex-ante expectations.

[10] Four of the first six reports published by the Social Exclusion Unit dealt with disadvantage among children and the young (truancy/school exclusion, teenage pregnancy, out-of-school/out-of-work youth, and young runaways).

broken down by age of the individual. That is, the percentage of persons in different age groups suffering from each disadvantage is given but the definition of disadvantage is common across the ages.

In this sense, children get no special place in the Eurostat analysis – there are no specific indicators that are intended to capture exclusion *among children*.[11] (Rather than this situation being the result of a choice by Eurostat, it may merely reflect the position of a number of member states, for whom child poverty is not regarded as a major issue.) As a result, measures that relate directly to the future prospects of children are absent by definition. True, persistent low household income is there (although only three years are covered by published analyses from ECHP to date) and this may indeed proxy much long-term disadvantage (even if the degree of causation is the subject of debate). But this can't pick up everything by any means. Nor does the incidence of long-term poverty shed light on the policy responses needed to combat disadvantage in education, in health, and in other areas of child well-being. By focusing on the links between low income and other general measures of household disadvantage as revealed in one survey, Eurostat's analysis of social exclusion has been rather limited in what it can say about child exclusion.

Compared to Who?[12]

Children can be defined as excluded only by considering their circumstances relative to those of others. As one 14 year old girl in a UK family reliant upon state benefits said:

> '...for me it's about not being part of things, not having the money to live normally like other people.' (Roker and Coleman 1998: 17)

But are the things that this teenager considers she is 'not part of' those things being done by her peers, or the things being done by the population at large? Are the other people who 'live normally' other families *with children* or are they other families in general? In other words there is a reference group issue.

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11 Some measures are explicitly not defined for children at all. For example, the indicator for social interaction with friends and relatives outside the household is only defined for those aged over 16.

12 I draw in part here on chapter 2 of Bradbury, Jenkins and Micklewright (2001).

The child angle in discussion of relative living standards is not typically prominent. Contrast this with efforts to establish an absolute poverty measure. The definition of an absolute poverty line has often started with consideration of the cost of subsistence for a family with children. This is true of Rowntree's work in England at the beginning of the 20th century and Orshansky's analysis which underlay what became the official US poverty line in the 1960s, as well as other later 'budget standards' approaches. In this sense, children have featured prominently in attempts to define critical levels of living standards in absolute terms. On the other hand, discussion of relative standards has not had a child focus. The comment of Adam Smith, often quoted in discussion of relative poverty – that a person would be ashamed to appear in public in late 18th century Britain if he did not sport leather shoes and a linen shirt – is a more remark about parents' living standards than about those of their children.

If children are excluded from social participation by low living standards, the most important form of this may be exclusion from the lifestyle typically enjoyed by other children. In the case of income poverty, this suggests the use of a poverty line defined with reference to the average living standards of children in society, rather than those of all persons.

Bradbury and Jäntti (1999, 2001) show how child poverty rates change in industrialised countries covered by the Luxembourg Income Survey (LIS) when one switches from a poverty line of half the overall median to one of half the median of the 'child distribution' (that is, children ranked by equivalised household income). In all 25 countries considered, child poverty when assessed against the 'child median' is lower, typically by about one-third. This is because the family income of the median child is less than the overall median (although as the authors point out the relativities between children and others are sensitive to the choice of equivalence scale).

Many people may object to the implication that exclusion of children would not rise if children as a group drifted down the overall income distribution but the distribution of income within the group stayed the same. Children form part of society as a whole and the overall median is the better societal norm. Or, drawing on the notion of perceptions that some commentators feel is an essential part of the concept of exclusion, if the child median were to fall well below the

overall median, children would probably begin to perceive that their households lacked things that childless households did not.[13]

Arguments for a child-based reference standard might be stronger if child consumption were actually measured. The assumption typically made in applied work on living standards is that families pool their resources, so that in the calculations with the LIS that have just been described each child is assigned the equivalised value of household income. However, there is a lot of anecdotal evidence that the distribution of resources within the household is not even. An Indianapolis single mother of two comments of her children:

> 'he wears the latest Nike brand shoes and she the latest Levi's. I like them to look nice, and here in the ghetto there are standards of dress. If they don't dress up to the standards, other kids tend to pick on them. I am not the only poor person who dresses her kids.' (*The New York Times*, 18 October 1999).

In this case the children's exclusion in one dimension of their lives is prevented as a results of the intra-household distribution of resources being shifted towards them. However, something else must give somewhere in the family budget and it is unlikely to be just their mother's personal consumption. As she also added, 'they think I am richer than I am', noting that the gas had been turned off recently when she could not pay the bill and that she also lacked money to fix her car. The loss of the use of the car may be particularly important, excluding the children from participation in various activities and reducing their mother's ability to commute or to search for work. (A telephone would be another example of an important public good within the family.)

More systematic evidence on children's individual living standards has been found by various authors. Middleton et al. (1997) interviewed mothers of British children and the children themselves (children aged over five). The authors report that 'parents are more likely to go without than children; one half of parents who are defined

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[13] The concept of the child income distribution is very useful however when comparing the dynamics of child poverty across countries. Bradbury, Jenkins and myself look at mobility out of the bottom fifth of the child income distribution for seven industrialised countries (Bradbury, Jenkins and Micklewright 2000 and 2001). The advantage is one of standardisation: in year one exactly 20 percent of children in each country are defined as having low income.

as 'poor' themselves have children who are found to be 'not poor'' (1997: 5). In particular a large percentage of mothers, especially lone mothers receiving social assistance benefits, said that they often or sometimes go without items or activities in order to provide things for their children. Middleton et al.'s research draws attention to potential inequalities between mothers and fathers, as well as between parents and children. This matters for children because the impact on their living standards of higher family benefits may depend on which parent the extra resources are paid to. Recent research suggests that payments to mothers are more effective in raising expenditures on children's goods and services: see for example Lundberg et al. (1997) and Phipps and Burton (1998).

What is needed to assess child exclusion in the area of current living standards is systematic measurement of what children actually consume or do. Nolan (2000: 73) describes measures being added to the 1999 Living in Ireland Survey, the Irish part of ECHP. Mothers of children aged under 14 were asked whether lack of money over the previous year had meant children having to do without various things, for example a birthday party with friends, school trips, music lessons or playing sport. As far as children's future prospects are concerned, much measurement by definition should also be at the level of the child – the child's health, the child's education and so on – with the natural reference point being other children.

A final question here is 'which children' in the definition of the reference group? One dimension of this is location, addressed below. But 'communities' can be defined on other than a geographic basis, for example on ethnic lines (obviously there are often geographic concentrations of different ethnic groups). In a multi-cultural society children may be part of a minority culture but not necessarily excluded and in this case the issue then becomes one of inequality between communities. Put another way, is exclusion from a *particular* community or from *any* community?[14]

Compared to Where?

Any discussion of relativity has to address the issue of geography. Should the touchstone for comparison be local, national or international?

Poverty measurement in the EU has focused on a *national* standard – see the 1984 definition of poverty in the Union given in the last section.

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[14] I am grateful to Tony Atkinson for this observation.

Children in Portugal are poor in Eurostat's analyses if their household income is below 60 percent of the Portugese median, Belgian children poor if below 60 percent of the Belgian median and so on. Given the differences in average incomes across the EU the resulting pattern of EU poverty rates contrasts markedly from those that would result from a common EU line. For example, moving to a common EU line would raise the overall poverty rate in Greece in 1996 from 21 to 39 percent and reduce that in France from 16 to 9 percent (Eurostat 2000: tables A.2.2.3 and A.2.2.3).[15]

If poverty were measured using a single EU poverty line then this might reinforce calls for explicit EU-level redistributive policies, clashing with the typical perception of the implications of 'subsidiarity'. Of course, there is a potential contradiction here with policy on 'economic and social cohesion' mentioned in section 2, which aims to reduce income disparities within the Union by explicitly linking regional development funds to differences in regional GDP per capita. In terms of solidarity or cohesion within the Union, a common poverty threshold appears attractive, as it captures what convergence of incomes is all about: poorer parts of Europe catching up with the others.

On the other hand, 'poverty' should be a term that is meaningful within each country, relevant to national sentiment and national policy making. This reinforces the choice of national lines for EU poverty measurement. And if relative poverty is about being excluded from things that others around you can participate in, then maybe the basis of comparison should be brought even closer to where people actually live – the region or state – with a policy spur to this shift in some countries provided by the devolution of programmes of cash benefits and social services.

The shift to a state-level standard to measure poverty makes a considerable difference to the pattern of child poverty rates across the US, as will be shown in the next section. It also makes a sharp difference in some European countries. This is true of Italy, where regional differences in average incomes are high. Switching from a half-national median income poverty line to a half-regional median line results in the child poverty rate in Sicily and Calabria, for example, falling from 45 percent to 19 percent (Rainwater, Smeeding and Coder 1999). In the rest of south Italy, the fall is less spectacular but still very substantial – from

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[15] Rates using an overall EU line are not given separately for children. For this see Immervoll et al (2001). See also Atkinson (1998a) for discussion of EU versus national lines.

27 percent to 16 percent. Nationally-based poverty lines reveal a poverty rate that is four times higher in the mid-south than in Lombardia in the north; state-based poverty lines show almost no difference between the two.

Italy is a good example of a European country where there is increasing demand for devolution of responsibilities in areas of policy that are important for child well-being, for example health, accompanied by some form of fiscal federalism (see Granaglia 2001). However, a move towards sub-national poverty lines in Italy or anywhere else in Europe would of course run counter to any tendency to move in the opposite direction by taking an European-wide yardstick in the EU.

There seem to me to be three criteria for selection of the appropriate geographic yardstick, of which two have so far been aired. First, how differences are perceived and hence exclusion is felt. The notion of participation in the 'local community' argues for a sub-national reference point. But the region or state is probably a far too aggregated unit for this (it is the standards in the ghetto that were referred to by the Indianapolis mother earlier in this section). Moreover, communities are aware of each other and have many common aspirations. Children in Calabria and Sicily watch the same television programmes as those in Lombardia – and often the same as their contemporaries in other European countries or even the US (for example 'Friends'). I don't think an argument of perception or participation leads inevitably to a sub-national reference point for assessing the exclusion of children.

Second, there is the geographical organisation of government and service delivery. For practical reasons – not those of principle – a sub-national yardstick may be a sensible one to emphasise if the political reality is that national sentiment is not in favour of national standards and policy responsibilities are heavily decentralised. However, in most European countries that national sentiment probably exists.

Third, there is the reality of the wider world in which children are growing-up. This is particularly important in the area of education. Knowledge, skills and the ability to apply them are increasingly traded in a global market place, either directly through migration or indirectly through working for a firm that is trading internationally and competing with others overseas. On this argument children are excluded from opportunities if their human capital is low by international standards.[16]

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[16] At the very least, reference points for education should be national – I can see no argument at all for counting children in Calabria and Sicily as excluded

The UK government's annual report on poverty and social exclusion looks too restrictive in this light: all seven of the education indicators for children refer to national standards only.

Of course, use of an international standard is only possible if something suitable is available. The assessments of learning achievement among children organised under the auspices of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement provide one possibility for those countries participating in the surveys concerned. For example, results from the 1999 repeat of the Third International Maths and Science Study (TIMSS) show the percentage of 8th grade children scoring above the international median (and other quantiles of the international distribution, i.e. the distribution of scores in the pooled sample for all participating countries). (The UK scores in maths in the 1995 TIMSS are given in Social Exclusion Unit 2001, although the rationale for the international comparison is not made explicit.) Another perhaps even more attractive possibility is the new Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) organised by the OECD (OECD 2001). PISA is an ambitious undertaking designed to regularly monitor 15 year-olds in all OECD members for their 'functional literacy', the ability to understand and to employ information in daily life.[17]

Finally, note that international comparisons may be used as part of an assessment of child poverty and exclusion even if the answer to the 'where' question is 'our country'. Comparisons of child well-being with that in other countries provide benchmarks in terms of what is attainable, despite the natural reference population being the national one. We may believe that child poverty should be assessed using a national poverty line, but it is still of interest to know how child poverty on this basis compares with that in other countries using similarly defined national lines. If country X's child poverty rate is well out of step then this suggests that something is going wrong. The UK government's recent presentation of poverty and exclusion among British children makes a number of comparisons of this type, calling attention for example to the fact that income poverty among children on a relative basis, the proportion of children in households where nobody

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from educational opportunities only by reference to a standard for southern Italy.

[17] Information on TIMSS and published reports can be found at www.timss.bc.edu and on PISA at www.oecd.org/els/pisa.

works and the extent of teenage motherhood are all high in the UK by international standards. This type of 'benchmarking' is also becoming more important in the EU.

Who excludes children?

Exclusion of children can result from the actions of one or more of various different agents – parents, schools, employers, governments. We also need to consider the agency of children, towards themselves or other children.

Parents, quite obviously, have an enormous influence on the well-being of their children. One implication is that parents must be a major potential agent for their children's exclusion. Parents may fail to make sufficient effort to find work and hence to bring enough money into the household. They may fail to spend their income fairly or wisely (the intra-household issue raised earlier). They may fail to take enough interest in the education of their children. They may fail to pay adequate attention to their children's health and nutrition. They may fail to help their children develop their social skills and contacts.

This may read like an onslaught on parents. But each sentence describing parental failures contains the word 'may'. The point is a simple one: given parents and parenting skills *are* very important to children's progress then parents have the ability to exclude as well as to encourage this progression. Parental failures leading to exclusion of children are typically inadvertent and may of course be greatly exacerbated or ameliorated by other agents. But the conclusion must be that 'social exclusion' is not a concept that removes from families all responsibility for their children's predicament. Of course, the implication of recognising parents as potential excluders – or includers – is that policy needs to help and work with parents.[18]

Schools exclude. Sometimes literally – 'school exclusions' (children being expelled permanently or temporarily from school) have been a considerable concern in the UK and the number of truancies and exclusions is one of the child indicators in the government's annual report on poverty and exclusion. But schools may be a source of

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[18] The worst forms of exclusion through parents may require state action to bring it to an end. Those children at risk of various forms of parental abuse are placed on the Child Protection Register in the UK and the number of re-registrations on the register is one of the child indicators in the official annual poverty and social exclusion report.

exclusion simply through their failure to teach their children to an adequate standard. Of course, school performance should in principle be measured in value-added terms, taking into account the backgrounds and ability on entry of their children – and the financial resources the schools have at their disposal.[19]

Employers may exclude children and young people, either directly through their decisions in the youth labour market or through the jobs held by parents. Employer 'short-termism' (the application of a high discount rate to future incomes) makes firms less willing to invest in job creation, resulting in exclusion from the labour market (Atkinson 1998). This seems particularly relevant to the position of young people trying to get a foothold in the world of work. Short-termism may also exclude young people from on-the-job training and may result in proliferation of temporary 'burger-flipping' jobs. And employers may be major potential sources of fringe benefits for parents, benefits in which children share. Health insurance is probably the key one, especially important in countries with weak public health provision.

Governments, both national and local, can exclude. They may fail to provide adequate public services – schools, health systems etc – whether through inadequate investment, inadequate current funding, or poor organisation. They may fail to intervene in the labour market to ease the entry of young persons, to give appropriate incentives to parents to move into work, to promote day care for single (and other) mothers, and to provide labour market training for those in need. They may fail to provide an adequate cash-income safety net for families with children who cannot find work. (Note that consistency requires that 'adequate' be interpreted in the relative sense discussed above.) They may fail to encourage alternatives to orphanages such as adoption or fostering when children end up in public care. (The exclusionary nature of children's institutions is a concern, for example, in much of Eastern Europe – see UNICEF 2001b.)

Finally, there is the possibility of exclusion by other children and of self-exclusion resulting from a child's own behaviour. Being 'sent to Coventry' – the explicit decision of a group of children (e.g. a school class) not to talk to one member of the group – is an obvious form of exclusion from a particular community (note the reference group issue

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[19] Barry (1998: 13) argues that schools exclude if their selection policy results in children of a homogenous social background, on the grounds that much research shows that 'children with middle class attitudes and aspirations constitute a resource for the rest'.

again). The same is true of being 'left out' in a vaguer sense from one's peer group's activities. Unpleasant at the time but also with possible consequences for child development if prolonged.

Self-exclusion could take various forms. One example is truancy from school. Another perhaps is drug addiction, although even here there are clearly other agents at work, including drug-pushers. But some commentators define exclusion as resulting only from the action of others, for example Barry (1998) who distinguishes between 'isolation', which may be self-imposed, and 'exclusion'. (Put another way, exclusion could be seen as a supply side phenomenon, with isolation coming from the demand side.) I'm not at all sure I agree with this view. The young offender who is incarcerated is literally excluded by and from normal society through being locked-away. But he or she chose to commit the offense – although of course society may have contributed to the pressures that led to that decision. Similarly, a child is formally excluded from school (sent home or expelled) as a result of the school's decision, but also as a result of his or her behaviour. While 'child poverty' resonates with many people due to the blamelessness that is assumed of the young (as opposed to the feckless behaviour assumed possible of adults) it is not clear to me that social exclusion should necessarily have the same attribute when applied to children, especially teenage children.

Much of the above is obvious. In one sense it says no more than that there are many influences on child well-being – which we knew already – and that attention needs to be paid to all of them. On the other hand, consideration of 'agency' may usefully force attention onto each and every one of these influences – away from luck and genetics – and may stimulate thought about what to do about them.

4. Is the US ripe for 'exclusion'?

The phrase 'social exclusion' does not occur in the federal government publication *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being 2000.* It is absent from the Department of Health and Human Services 2000 report to Congress on TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, or 'welfare'), and indeed is nowhere to be found on the Department's website. It does not occur in David Ellwood's excellent 2000 survey article on welfare reform (Ellwood 2000). And it does not exist in the Census Bureau 2001 report, *Poverty in the United States 2000.* The gulf between Europe and the US appears huge.

I can think of two reasons for interest in introducing 'social exclusion' into the debate on child well-being in the USA (or any another country). The first is the 'intellectual' one: a belief that this concept provides value-added in the definition and understanding of disadvantage in childhood and in the formulation of policies to address this disadvantage. The second is the 'political' one: a belief that exclusion provides a language for discussing disadvantage that many more policy makers will sign up for than is the case with alternatives, not least since it avoids the P-word, poverty (see Atkinson's comment earlier on the cynical view of the EU's adoption of exclusion).

I don't always try to distinguish between the two in this section. What I do is to discuss briefly several features of the US that are probably relevant to both these motivations. The order is fairly random, other than the deferral of some broader aspects of American society to last. There are no doubt some naïve comments and some important omissions from the list, but I hope that the view from the outside will at least provoke thought, both in American readers for whom the paper was first written and in fellow outsiders about the situation in their own countries.

Measurement of income poverty

This is not an auspicious start. Exclusion is a relative concept but the official US poverty line – almost universally used outside as well as inside government – is not intended to measure a living standard that has any relation with current societal norms. Contrast this with Europe where it is common both in government and academia to measure income poverty with a line set as a percentage of average or median incomes. (For example, this is true of official measurement of poverty in Ireland, Italy and the UK, and, as described earlier, the EU.) If measurement of even low income in the US takes no account of distance from the average, what hope is there for a concept like exclusion which has relativity at its core?

The problem it seems to me is not so much that the US line is an absolute one; calculations of a 'minimum necessary income' can and often do take account of what is necessary for the society in question. Rather it is the persistence with a definition of 'necessary' that is getting on for 40 years old. The original Orshansky minimum budget for a family of four in the early 1960s was in fact about half median net income of families of that type at that time, the ratio of average income

that much 'relative' poverty measurement in Europe focuses on. Now it is not much more than a quarter.

All this is well known and the mid-1990s of course saw a major review of the official poverty line by the National Research Council (Citro and Michael 1995). Nevertheless, as has been argued recently by Howard Glennerster,

> 'a European is struck by the relatively limited conceptual discussion of poverty in the US even today. Many of the most recent papers on poverty in the US continue to use the old official line as their starting point' (Glennerster 2000: 6).[20]

Glennerster goes on to summarise the development of poverty measurement in Europe since the 1950s, in effect describing the increasing use of a relative concept that has paved the way for the move to social exclusion.

Analysis of child well-being

When a European looks at what is available in the US in terms of data and analyses of child well-being, it is quite easy to feel sick at times – sick with jealousy. The US poverty line may not impress a European but, conditional on one's objection to that yardstick, the data and analyses of children's economic welfare and many other aspects of child well-being often dazzle.

First, a great deal was discovered about the dynamics of income poverty among children in the US well in advance of analogous endeavours in Europe. The long-running Panel Study on Income Dynamics (PSID) has been the source for much of this. Pioneering research on income dynamics by Bane and Ellwood (1986) built on earlier use of the PSID (see for example Duncan *et al.* 1984, Hill 1981). Ten years later, Ashworth *et al.* were able to comment that the distribution of the number of years during childhood spent poor was 'quite familiar territory' in the USA (1994: 663). Would that it were in Europe! Panel surveys have now been developed and used in several European countries, for example Germany and the UK, and the European Community Household Panel (ECHP) provides a key new resource, as noted earlier (although it is planned to end well before any

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[20] Glennerster does however note that the Luxembourg Income Study, which has done so much to extend the international dimension of poverty analysis in the US and elsewhere, is the brainchild of an American (Tim Smeeding)!

child's first 17 years will have been tracked). But the US still leads the way on what we know about low income patterns during childhood. And studies such as Duncan and Brooks-Gunn (1997), Duncan et al. (1998) and Mayer (1997) have done much to nail down the impact of low income in childhood on later life outcomes.

Second, both inside and outside government, analyses of the child well-being of American children already delve far beyond income into other areas – education, health (and health insurance), housing and social environment – including their overlaps with income poverty. *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being* would be a fine example for European governments to follow (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics 2000). And there are many others, including the 'Kids Count' state-level analyses of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Department of Health and Human Services' *Trends in the Well-Being on America's Children and Youth*.

The US is therefore already collecting and analysing a great deal of data on different aspects of childhood in which children have the potential to be excluded and considering how these overlap with each other. 'Child poverty' has long been seen as a multi-dimensional concept. Is all this good or bad news for the use of 'exclusion' in the US? On the one hand it is bad – one cannot look to social exclusion as something that will drive completely new collection and analysis of data on various areas of children's lives, as it has arguably done in some European countries. On the other hand it is good – the data are there and there is much analysis on which to build.

Those signing-up to the 'intellectual' motivation for use of exclusion would argue that the existing analyses and policies are no substitute for what could yet be attained. Those subscribing only to the 'political' reason might argue that a banner of exclusion would allow the existing work to penetrate yet further into the policy world.

National versus State-level standards

If exclusion is to gain ground as a concept in the US then those who seek to push it will have to think hard about the geographical definition of the society from which children can be excluded, and how this relates to the level at which anti-poverty policy operates. Is it better to persist with a *national* definition of *poverty* (albeit with variation in the poverty yardstick in line with some state-level prices, as recommended by the National Research Council review)? Or should the exclusion genie be let

out of the bottle with the risk that this leads to the use of state-level yardsticks?

As in some European countries (see the previous section), large differences in state-level incidence of cash poverty among American children result from switching from a national to a state-level poverty line (when defined in conventional 'European' terms). Rainwater, Smeeding and Coder (2001: table 2.1) show the effect of moving from a line of half the national median income to one of half the state median. (In doing so they also demonstrate that some Americans use relative poverty lines!) The average absolute difference in child poverty rates is 4.1 percentage points and the correlation between the two rates is 0.53. New Jersey and Arkansas, the richest and poorest states respectively with median incomes 25 percent above and 25 percent below the national figure, see their child poverty rates rise from 14 to 22 percent (New Jersey) and fall from 26 percent to 14 percent (Arkansas).

What I have labelled as a 'risk' others might call an advantage. Rainwater et al argue for state-level measurement:

> 'the state standards explored here come closer to the social standards that in fact operate when societies define some people as poor...Moving from the national level to the state level would seem a step in the right direction' (Rainwater et al. 2001: 66)

One argument Rainwater and his co-authors use is the practical one that 'welfare reform' has led to the states having a bigger role in policy to fight child poverty. As they note, states now have 'full latitude', subject to very few federal constraints, in their design of means-tested welfare support to families (TANF), including eligibility, benefit levels and duration.[21]

I put the counter argument in general terms in the previous section. However, American readers of the first draft of the paper have in turn put to me that anyone wanting to promote the concept of exclusion in the US would do well to recognise that in a federal vacuum 'states are where the action is at' right now in the social welfare field. If a few key states were to be persuaded as to the value of the exclusion concept – even if exclusion is defined in relation to a sub-national

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[21] Meyers et al (2001) show the differences across states in a range of policies to support families with children, showing that these exist not only in AFDC/TANF.

reference group – then this would help the concept percolate upwards and outwards.

Welfare to Work

There are three reasons why 'welfare reform' seems relevant to use of the concept of exclusion. One is the state versus national focus just discussed. The second is its emphasis on 'personal responsibility' which I deal with at the end of this section. And the third is the dynamic perspective to US anti-poverty policy that it illustrates, emphasising the prevention of entry into poverty and the promotion of exits (rather than just paying benefits to the currently poor) and welfare reform's emphasis on inclusion into the labour market.

Debate of course rages on whether welfare reform has been effective in achieving its goals (summarised, for example, in Ellwood 2000). Welfare rolls have plummeted: the number of families on AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) and its successor, TANF, has more than halved since 1993. Support for working families has sharply increased, and more disadvantaged parents, especially single parents, appear to be working. On the other hand, there were concerns from the outset over what would happen were the economy to go into recession, concerns that the 2001 economic downturn have sharpened. There is evidence about the instability of jobs taken after exits from TANF, the plight of parents who cannot get work for whatever reason is clear, and the impact on child well-being as opposed to parental work status is questioned.

However, this debate is not particularly relevant to the point at stake here, namely that US policy makers and analysts are already well-attuned to a policy emphasis on 'including' people into the labour market, the focus of much discussion of exclusion in Europe (some would say an excessive focus).[22] (Of course, the quality of jobs into which people are included remains an issue.) That could be useful for the fortunes of social exclusion as a concept in the US. The UK case is particularly relevant here – some aspects of New Labour's social policy

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[22] It might argued that US policy places more emphasis on 'pushing' than 'including', making the similarity less strong. However, European readers aware of the reduction in generosity of welfare benefits in the US may be surprised like me by the extent of incentives now given through support to working families via such measures as the Earned Income Tax Credit (see Ellwood 2000).

reforms in its anti-exclusion and anti-poverty strategy have clearly been influenced by the US policy debate (see Glennerster 2000 for further comment on this).

Inner-cities and the underclass

The US poverty literature has paid much attention to problems of local communities, including the inner-city ghetto. This is highly compatible with the focus on area in some of exclusion literature, noted earlier in the paper towards the end of Section 2. (The papers in Power and Wilson 2000 provide a comparison of UK and US work on urban disadvantage, that by Power on the UK explicitly stressing exclusion and that by Wilson on the US not.) There is a natural child angle in this focus on area given the importance to child development of local services such as schools, and high inner city youth unemployment.[23] Whether this compatibility makes exclusion more or less useful in the US as an organisational concept for addressing problems of community disadvantage is a matter for debate, with the arguments for and against similar to those relating to the analysis of child well-being discussed above.

A related issue is that of the 'underclass', also prominent in the US debate on poverty since the 1960s. Nolan and Whelan (1996: 153) quote Peterson (1991) as saying this is a concept that can appeal to conservatives, liberals and radicals alike. The same could be claimed of social exclusion. However, as Nolan and Whelan go on to note, there is wide agreement that only a sub-set of the poor could be considered to the underclass, whereas exclusion is typically intended as being a broader concept than poverty. Again, one can see the US experience of the underclass concept as cutting both ways.

Child poverty, the macroeconomy – and politics

Child poverty measured with the official US poverty line fell each year from a peak of 22.7 percent in 1993 to 16.2 percent in 2000.[24] Income

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[23] Area effects on child well-being can even include the propensity to commit crime. Ludwig et al (1999) use data from a randomised housing-mobility experiment in Baltimore to show that moving between low-poverty and high-poverty areas has an effect on criminal behaviour of US teenagers.

[24] Child poverty rates are given at www.census.gov/hhes/poverty/histpov/hstpov3.html. The Census Bureau website also gives results based on

poverty among children, measured by this yardstick, is now at its lowest level for 20 years. Welfare reform and associated policies to increase labour supply may be one factor but another has been the strength of the US economy, which until 2001 experienced a period of unprecedented growth. As the economy now falters, child poverty can be expected to move back up, although whether it edges or leaps remains to be seen. (The reduced effectiveness of TANF as a safety net compared to AFDC may be one factor in this.) Does a falling child poverty rate make it harder to introduce discussion of 'exclusion' and a rising rate make it easier? Arguments could be made both ways.

And politics? Does the change in tenant at the White House make it easier to attract the Administration to exclusion, or harder? Perhaps a change in administration provides of itself an opportunity for pushing a fresh concept with policy makers. Or maybe the new administration's concerns are not conducive.

Other aspects of American society

This final sub-section has been added following the conference for which the paper was written and is based on comments of the American participants at that meeting. Besides the specific features of US society and institutions that I mention above are there more general aspects that need to be taken into account?

First, history. It could be argued that in the past the US has been very inclusive in some senses, notably due to the arrival of large numbers of immigrants from different cultures and the need to absorb them into a 'melting pot society'. The early development of widespread public education (see Lindert 2001) was a strongly inclusive policy. More recently however, exclusion as an official sanction for anti-social behaviour has become very evident in the extremely high levels of incarceration, especially among young black men. Social exclusion is seen here (by some) as a *solution* to a problem.

Second, if 'social exclusion' is seen as stemming solely from the actions of others it will jar badly with American emphasis on personal responsibility. Not for nothing was the welfare reform legislation of the Clinton administration entitled 'The Personal Responsibility and Work

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experimental measures that implement the Citro/Michael recommendations. These show somewhat larger falls in child poverty than the official rate over 1993-98, ranging from 5.4 to 6.1 percentage points (Table E definitions) compared to 3.8 points with the official measure.

Opportunity Reconciliation Act'. Inevitably, for some people, 'social' may imply that society is to blame. I argued in Section 3 that the definition of social exclusion should be broad enough to allow agency of the individual himself or herself, at least in a contributory role, although I also noted that some commentators rule this out.

Third, and following on from the above, Americans' tolerance of inequality is generally higher than that of Europeans and the lack of any relativity in the measurement of income poverty discussed earlier is just one manifestation of this.[25] Another is the less well-developed welfare state. The rhetoric of American politics on occasion seems to encourage the language of inclusion in discussion of distributional issues, as in the Bush administration's 'No Child Left Behind Act' of 2001 (concerned with education), but the typical interpretations of equality of opportunity in the US and access to the American Dream are probably not sympathetic to the entry of 'social exclusion'. The opposition in some sections of American society to a broad conception of human rights that encompasses the economic, social and cultural fields (so-called 'positive' rights), subscribed to by most European countries, is not encouraging in this respect.

Lastly, what may be perceived as 'European ideas' are not always well-received. Several Americans have put to me the view that, like it or not, the fact that exclusion has taken Europe by storm is something that should be kept quiet by anyone trying to promote the concept in the US.

5. Conclusions

My conclusions relate both to the concept of social exclusion itself, including its application to children, and to the possible expansion of the concept in the US in the analysis of child well-being.

Does social exclusion offer value-added over multi-dimensional poverty or deprivation? If it does, it is as a complement rather than as a substitute, and that is how it is used most of the time in Europe. 'Poverty' will continue to have a lot of resonance that exclusion may never have, as well as being something that is easier to define. Social exclusion's emphasis on *process* seems useful. The application of the concept to children needs more thought but the headings suggested by

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[25] See Evans (1993) for an international comparison of attitudes to income differences within each country, showing US respondents to be the least likely to agree that they are too large.

Atkinson that were used in Section 3 – dynamics, relativity and agency – offer a good route forward.

The same headings are useful for thinking about possible value-added in the USA. The US literature on child-well being is good on dynamics but less so on relativity and, arguably, agency. Relativity seems to me to be a nettle that will have to be firmly grasped by anyone seeking to promote the concept of exclusion in America and as part of this some serious thought will have to be given to the geographical dimension.

The problems in defining the concept could help it gain currency in the US, in the same way as it has been argued that they have in Europe, exclusion meaning 'all things to all people' (Atkinson 1998: 6). But one needs to be prepared for that heterogeneity.

Finally, some reflection on the past may be worthwhile. I referred to history at the end of Section 4. Would 'exclusion' have usefully deepened and widened the attack during President Johnson's 'War on Poverty', producing the 'joined-up policy' that is the current aim of the British government? Or would it have helped in the debate on welfare leading to the 1996 reforms?

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